

Entrepreneurship Is Open to All

Jonathan Ortmans speaks at the Global Entrepreneurship Conference in March 2014.

Credit: UnleashingIdeas.org

Global Entrepreneurship Week, November 17-24, is a collection of interconnected startup communities across the world, devoted to the notion that all boats rise on an incoming tide. That's according to Jonathan Ortmans, the president of this annual enterprise, which unfolds this year in 140 countries.

0. Ortmans, who started his own company at the age of 19, offers these guidelines for the up-and-coming businessperson.

What are five reasons that 2014 is the best time to start a business?

0. 1. Startup communities are stronger than ever. They provide entrepreneurs with resources, inspiration, peer support, networking events and more.
2. Entrepreneurs can access many online free education tools, such as the [Kauffman Founders School](#), the [Khan Academy](#) entrepreneurship series and [EdX](#).
3. Entrepreneurs can implement business ideas with less initial capital today, using new technology and platforms.
4. Business creation is no longer a matter of pedigree, family or elite education. Entrepreneurship is open to all.
5. Customers are more open to new solutions. Many early adopters are willing to provide entrepreneurs with the feedback to fine-tune products or services.

What are four qualities required to be a successful entrepreneur?

1. Entrepreneurs are sustained by their passion in the pursuit of success, even when the odds are against them.
2. Successful entrepreneurs know how to effectively collaborate and communicate with others, which are crucial skills for marketing ideas, building teams, seeking financial backing and other critical startup activities.
3. Successful entrepreneurs understand the value of a support system in their community and aren't afraid to utilize it.
4. Successful entrepreneurs have previous experience in the sector they are entering.

What are three pieces of advice for new entrepreneurs?

1. Wait to seek outside capital. You'll build a nimble business by standing it up on your own and finding advice from mentors rather than investors. Evaluate why and when to raise money, as well as the consequences of accepting outside funding.
2. Build the right team. Each member of a startup team should bring new, complementary skills to the table while sharing the passion for the idea.
3. Test the vision continuously. Validate your idea, keeping your startup lean, improving your concept, measuring success, learning and ... doing it all again.

Learn more about [Global Entrepreneurship Week](#) and the [Global Entrepreneurship Summit](#).



This article is condensed from the original version appearing in [The Eurooptimist.eu](#).

Nigerian Entrepreneur Makes Shoes, One Pair at a Time

"Follow your dreams with courage, imagination and the ability to attract and work with the best minds."


Credit: Niyi Omodara



Niyi Omodara, a young entrepreneur and member of the YALI Network, is the founder, designer and principal craftsman of Extra Valuable Apparel (EVA), a footwear company in Akure, Nigeria. He is a self-taught craftsman who started making slippers for his family in the early 1990s. Omodara is now producing "bespoke" shoes, customized for a client and made to order. His vision for EVA is to "manufacture world-class leather products through superior designs and quality materials."

Could you describe your business to the YALI Network?

Omodara: EVA shoes are distinct because they are comfy, trendy and neater than all other Nigerian handmade shoes. I both design and create shoes for individual customers. Our products are sold largely by word-of-mouth, one customer to the next, through social media and wherever I can find customers. Each month we produce in the range of 35-50 pairs of customized shoes. That comes to about 450-480 pairs per year.

EVA produces more than 450 pairs of  custom-made shoes per year in Akure,

Nigeria.

Credit: Niyi Omodara

How many people do you employ?

Omodara: Presently, I have two staff members and two trainees. One person assists me in shoe production alongside the trainees, while the second staff person works mainly on the branding, marketing and delivery of orders to our customers.

We are working hard to get more motivated [employees] in the production section. Finding skilled and dedicated workers is hard, but we are optimistic.

What are your goals for this business?

Omodara: I'm constantly updating my business plan, but these are my overall goals:

1. To become Nigeria's hallmark for locally made products, especially in the leather manufacturing industry. I hope EVA can achieve this with an individualistic approach to customer satisfaction and service and by using the highest-quality materials.
2. To be a global player in shoe manufacturing from Africa by the year 2035. To achieve that, it becomes more obvious by the day that we will have to partner with international shoe-manufacturing factories to scale up production significantly. At that level, my role will largely be design, quality assurance, general supervision and marketing.
3. To continuously attract, train and retain the best minds and hands in order to fulfill the earlier mentioned goals.

One of the shoe designs available from 

EVA

Credit: Niyi Omodara

What advice do you give to others hoping to start a small business?

Omodara: Follow your dreams with courage, imagination and the ability to attract and work with the best minds. Focus intently on your goals. Loyalty, commitment and passion for the job are critical virtues, technical skills apart.

Are there any special obstacles for entrepreneurs and small-business persons in Nigeria?

Omodara: Yes, there are plenty of them:

- 1) The lack of a consistent, reliable energy supply is a big one in Nigeria. I generate my own power to run the factory half of the time. That required an initial investment of almost \$1,000, and about \$100 per month to maintain gasoline and service.
- 2) Access to investment capital is difficult when interest rates on bank loans run up to double figures. I started in 2011 with about \$105 in capital that I drew from savings.

3) Numbers of skilled workers are insufficient due to a general preference among young people for white-collar jobs rather than positions requiring skilled labour. The lack of skilled workers becomes a barrier to increased production for EVA.

Please briefly describe EVA's supply chain. Are raw materials locally sourced or imported?

Omodara: We buy all our raw materials in Nigeria. On the sales end, customers buy directly from us. We have contacted some of the biggest online stores in Nigeria to discuss making EVA products available, but no reply yet.

Are you a young entrepreneur? Share your experiences with the YALI Network on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

During the month of November, the YALI Network will focus on the topic of entrepreneurship, in recognition of the [Global Entrepreneurship Summit](#) to be held in Morocco November 19-21.

Is Entrepreneurship for You?

Starting your own business can be an exciting and rewarding experience. It can offer numerous advantages, such as being your own boss, setting your own schedule and making a living doing something you enjoy. But becoming a successful entrepreneur requires thorough planning, creativity and hard work.

Credit: Shutterstock



Consider whether you have the following characteristics and skills commonly associated with successful entrepreneurs:

1. Comfortable with taking risks: Being your own boss also means you're the one making tough decisions. Entrepreneurship involves uncertainty. Do you avoid uncertainty in life at all costs? If yes, then entrepreneurship may not be the best fit for you. If you enjoy the thrill of taking calculated risks, read on.

2. Independent: Entrepreneurs must make a lot of decisions on their own. If you find you can trust your instincts — and you're not afraid of rejection every now and then — you could be on your way to being an entrepreneur.

3. Persuasive: You may have the greatest idea in the world, but if you cannot persuade customers, employees, and potential lenders or partners, you may find entrepreneurship to be challenging. If

you enjoy public speaking, engage new people with ease and find you make compelling arguments grounded in facts, it's likely you're poised to make your idea succeed.

4. Able to negotiate: As a small-business owner, you will need to negotiate everything from leases to contract terms to prices. Polished negotiation skills will help you save money and keep your business running smoothly.

5. Creative: Are you able to think of new ideas? Can you imagine new ways to solve problems? Entrepreneurs must be able to think creatively. If you have insights on how to take advantage of new opportunities, entrepreneurship may be a good fit.

6. Support from others: Before you start a business, it's important to have a strong support system in place. You'll be forced to make many important decisions, especially in the first months of opening your business. If you do not have a support network of people to help you, consider finding a business mentor — someone who is experienced, successful, and willing to provide advice and guidance.

Adapted from an article published on the [U.S. Small Business Administration](#) website.

Applying to be Mandela Washington Fellow: The Interview, Your Turn to Shine

Prepare for the Interview

1. The key to a successful interview is to answer the question asked, not the question you want to hear or are best prepared for. Be sure to listen to the interviewer carefully in order to hear the full question. Answer the question directly and fully.
2. You will likely be asked a number of questions related to your application. Review your application prior to your interview so that you can be confident and articulate when discussing your responses.
3. Be prepared to explain why you chose your selected program track.

Make a Good Impression

1. Wear business attire.
2. Maintain eye contact. Engage everyone on the selection panel, not just the person asking a question.

3. Greet each person on the selection panel when you enter the interview room and thank each person when you leave.
4. Hold an upright, but not wooden posture. Your body language should indicate engagement, confidence and composure.
5. Beware of nervous habits like fixing your hair, constant smiling, fumbling with your fingers or jewelry, and mumbling or raising your voice.

Respond Thoughtfully to Questions

1. Listen carefully to each question and take time to consider your response so that you can respond both briefly and fully. It is better to pause to think before you answer than to rush into a poorly thought out response . Avoid saying “That’s a good question” as a way to gain time to think.
2. Be honest. If you do not know the answer to a particular question, admit that you do not know.

Credit: AP Images



3. If you don’t understand a question, ask for clarification or for the interviewer to rephrase the question. Be sure to fully respond to the question once you understand it.
4. Well-thought out answers are essential to success in interviews. Your responses should give the panel the opportunity to see how you think and how you develop your ideas.
5. Provide specific examples to illustrate your points.
6. Be prepared to be interrupted or cut off. Interviewers may want to shift topics to adhere to time constraints.
7. Be clear, concise and confident in your answers. Avoid speaking non stop for prolonged periods of time, no matter how interesting your story, most people start to lose focus after a couple of minutes
8. Make clear connections between your goals and the goals of the Fellowship in your answers.
9. Prepare a response for an open-ended closing question such as, “Is there anything else you would like to tell the panel?” An answer that is brief, honest, and substantive is best.


Practice

1. Engage friends or colleagues in conversations in which you are challenged to present and support your ideas or interests. Get their feedback. Notice how you make those talking with you feel comfortable and engaged even when the conversation is challenging.
2. Do practice interviews with your friends or colleagues. Some people find it helpful to practice answering common interview questions while looking in a mirror.

Source: Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

You also may be interested in [The Crucial Job Interview](#) on yali.state.gov.

'Finish. Finish. Finish.' Fellowship Alumnus Urges Applicants

Helawi Sewnet in front of the White 
House, the presidential mansion, while
visiting Washington. Photo Courtesy Helawi
Sewnet.

With only days remaining until a November 5 application deadline, Helawi Sewnet advises applicants for the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders that pushing through the process, completing and submitting the application is imperative.

Sewnet, a 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow, said he was motivated to apply because the program presented “an intense, well-designed package. It offered me an opportunity to make progress in my community in Africa. And it was a wonderful opportunity to meet President Obama.”

The application process gave Sewnet a new understanding of the concept of leadership. “I used to associate leadership with a position or level of recognition — about the ability to influence,” he said.

“Then it came to me it was about how to communicate and demonstrate what was inside of me.”

He encourages applicants to “be bold and expressive. Choose [to describe] the right experiences among all the things you have done. ... What is that special thing you would like to communicate or would like the reviewer to know [about] you?”

In his own successful application, Sewnet wrote of his experience co-founding the first urban architectural journal in Ethiopia.

Sewnet tells potential applicants to make sure they get the application done by the deadline.

“At this point it is not decided who will be a Mandela Washington Fellow. So every second [that passes] from this point on — through the application and interview — has the power to determine whether you will be a Mandela Washington Fellow or somebody else,” Sewnet emphasizes.

As a Fellow, the Ethiopian studied public management at the University of Minnesota with 24 other Fellows from sub-Saharan Africa during June and July 2014. Sewnet’s group of “confident, energetic, experienced Fellows” enjoyed a “well-designed curriculum and opportunities to learn through

various organizations about the U.S. culture,” he said.

Since returning to Ethiopia, Sewnet communicates regularly with other Fellows in his Minnesota group. He keeps in touch with contacts he made in the United States and advises potential applicants in Ethiopia about the application process.

“I feel energized. What I think is possible now is different than what I thought was possible before.”

To learn more about the application for the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship Program, visit:

[Frequently asked questions about the application](#)

[Answers to your questions about the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship](#)

[More information about the Mandela Washington Fellowship](#)

Watch the full interview with Helawi Sewnet:

Sharing My Experiences: Mandela Washington Fellow Aminazahra Sigat

“YALI is a great opportunity for all young leaders who believe in Africa.”

“I’m not the same person as the one who came from Kenya a few weeks ago,” exclaimed Aminazahra Sigat after spending a few weeks studying at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in the small city of Menomonie.



“I learned more about leadership. I found out about my strengths. I learned about the importance of communication, consistency, responsibility and how to win over people,” she said. “I learned how to give back to society and about how Americans are used to making donations to organizations they care about.”

Sigat plans to take what she learned to mentor young girls in her community. “I want them to see me as a role model and to learn from me so they can become better persons,” she said. Sigat is the procurement and logistics assistant for the group Transition Initiatives for Stabilization project of the International Organization for Migration.

“I also want to help empower them so they can become an entrepreneur, a leader or a good public manager — so that they can get their own income and independence.”

“YALI is a great opportunity for all young leaders who believe in Africa,” she said.

Sharing My Experiences: Mandela Washington Fellow Ruka De-Liman

"To be a leader ... is to mobilize people to be better."

Ruka De-Liman values equal access to opportunity.

When she was a young girl in Ghana, De-Liman's neighbors thought that instead of going to school, girls should marry. But her parents thought differently. They wanted all of their children to get an education. Now De-Liman, who has a bachelor's degree in community development, advocates for girls' education, an end to violence against women and the elimination of female genital mutilation.

Photo Credit: State Dept.



"Empowered women will be better and go further in everything."

Now 28, De-Liman also runs an expanding poultry business that she started with savings from her teaching job. She employs mostly local women and teaches them and others how to manage money. "I try to get them to adopt savings practices," she said.

During her Mandela Washington Fellowship, De-Liman studied business at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie. Visiting local companies, she learned about the concept of supply-chain management. "You need to know the players in your supply chain and how to relate to them so your business can be more profitable," she said.

"I have had a wonderful time sharing my experience with colleagues and younger women, trying to inspire them to become more committed to community development and issues that will promote national development."

"I have shared the skills and knowledge I learned about new business concepts like supply-chain management, organizational structure and marketing with some of my colleagues who also own businesses," she said after she returned home from her Fellowship.

De-Liman was invited to serve as a mentor at a camp organized by the Ghana Think Foundation. "A lot of the participants were very happy to interact with me. ... They also consulted with me [about their] community service ideas that they wanted to initiate."

De-Liman will use her newly developed skills to help one friend with a children's education project. Other friends are working on malaria prevention awareness and a laundry service business, and De-Liman plans to help them too.

When she returned to Ghana from the Fellowship, the entrepreneur also organized a volunteer day called “Paint Our Home” to bring young people together to raise resources to paint the Tamale Nyohini Children’s Home, an orphanage.

“This is to inspire the spirit of volunteerism in the people and also let them see volunteering as a skill in developing opportunity,” she said.

De-Liman is reaching out to her community about the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship application: “I have been encouraging young people to take initiatives that would help build them a strong accomplishment statement, and I have volunteered to support interested persons with the application process and also guidelines for preparing for the interview,” she said.

De-Liman stressed that through her Fellowship she has learned about real leadership.

“To be a leader is not just to be at the forefront — it is to mobilize people to be better.”

Sharing My Experience: Mandela Washington Fellow Amina Joan Oshiokpekhai

Amina is a Nigerian entrepreneur who founded Abuja Cakes and Sugarcraft Society, a group of women who share ideas and inspiration to foster growth in business.

Photo credit: Amina Oshiokpekhai



“Focus on what makes you stand out.”

Being a Mandela Washington Fellow in June and July 2014 was a blessing for me and one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

I don’t have a university degree or the professional credentials of others selected for the fellowship. But I am a resilient, optimistic businessperson, determined to achieve my dreams.


I entered the fellowship on the business and entrepreneurial track, assigned to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. I attended lectures and engaged in debate with my professors and other fellows about contemporary business practices. I learned methods for beginning a successful startup, strengthening a thriving business and tackling the challenges that arise for all business people.

We learned how to draw up a business plan and all its key components. I discovered that I had already been applying some of these practices in my business by instinct alone.

Training exercises showed us how to make effective decisions as leaders, work in teams and understand our strengths and weaknesses as leaders.

Being introduced to top leaders in American businesses, institutions and social enterprises was another dimension of the experience. We visited top-notch companies such as Crain Communications, IBM's Innovation Lab, the McDonald's Corporation and Google Chicago, just to mention a few.

Talking with these successful professionals and experiencing their energy was refreshing. I have so much to learn about the business world, but I realized that I can go as far as my guts can take me.


Volunteering at a community service 

project.

Photo credit: Amina Oshiokpekhai

We also volunteered in community service projects — going to farmlands to weed grasses, playing with kids and mentoring teenagers. We saw the socioeconomic voids that volunteer organizations fill and the benefits of giving back to society. We experienced American culture and community life at sporting events, concerts, food exhibitions and other activities.

After my weeks at Northwestern University, I went to the Washington Summit, where I rubbed shoulders with more executives from top nongovernmental organizations and businesses.

Amina Oshiokpekhai with other 2014 

Mandela Washington Fellows

Photo credit: Amina Oshiokpekhai


I made many worthwhile contacts, and I am working on building future relationships with these people.

The most significant contacts I made are new friends from all over Africa — Uganda, Niger, Guinea, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique and more. We shared our stories and, in so doing, realized we all have the same struggles and fears. We also share pride and ambition to realize our goals.

This comradeship provides great motivation to, as Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change we wish to see in the world."

At the summit, President Obama, first lady Michelle Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry and other prominent people related to us like friends. President Obama spoke about the challenges young people face in Africa and his intentions to support young African entrepreneurs with financial grants and skills training.

It was inspirational to learn that the first African-American U.S. president will be watching to see what young Africans can achieve in the future.

Amina Oshiokpekhai holding her 2014 

Mandela Washington Fellowship

certificate

Photo credit: Amina Oshiokpekhai

My experience as a Mandela Washington Fellow was overwhelming in the best possible way!


If you're applying for the 2015 program, I recommend that you be original in your application and focus on what makes you stand out. If you are making a social or business impact in your community, by whatever means, be proud to say so. Prepare a compelling one-minute pitch about your achievements to make a memorable impression.

If you are selected, go to the United States with an inquisitive mind and a commitment to learn all you can. That attitude will allow you to return to Africa with people-oriented initiatives that would transform your community and our continent at large.

More Mandela Washington Fellows describe their [experience](#).

Girl Power and Protection, Now and Forever

Even as a child in Zimbabwe, Nyaradzo Mashayamombe tried to defend and protect abused orphans. In secondary school, she saw boys bullying and mistreating girls and began to dream of a world where things could be different.

Nyaradzo Mashayamombe visits schools  regularly to talk to schoolchildren about their role in preventing violence. (Photo Credit: N. Mashayamombe)

Describing herself as a born activist, Mashayamombe foresaw a time when boys would respect girls as much as themselves. Mashayamombe, a member of the YALI Network, also set her sights on bringing girls greater opportunities for education and achievement.

Mashayamombe celebrates the International Day of the Girl on October 11 with the knowledge that she has shared that dream with about 38,000 people across Zimbabwe through the organization she began in 2010, [Tag a Life International \(TaLI\)](#).


With financial support through U.S. Embassy Harare, the U.S. President's Plan for Emergency AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and Hivos, a Netherlands-based international development organization, Mashayamombe has started TaLI clubs in 76 schools. These chapters and their supporters work to reduce gender-based violence and to address the social circumstances that give rise to such violence. Reducing the occurrence of HIV infection among abused girls is another important

objective.

The U.S. Embassy projects that its financial support for TaLI will allow the organization to reach 300 more schools with lessons of respect and opportunity over the next two years.

Even while TaLI supporters envision a time in Zimbabwe when children are never tormented and girls never abused, the organization works to provide resources to children who have already been victimized. TaLI provides medical attention, psychosocial counseling and other support services to abused children. The organization also works with law enforcement to help bring cases of abuse to justice.

“We want to see the government of Zimbabwe committing more resources to the issue of child protection,” Mashayamombe said in a statement released in recognition of the Day of the Girl. “We also want to see well-resourced justice delivery system and a swift response to cases of abuse.”

South African schoolgirls play a ball  game. Ensuring that girls get educational opportunities will improve their entire future.

Reducing gender-based violence and promoting greater empowerment of girls and women is a cause with broad support across the YALI Network. Another network member wrote us about her work at [Sonke Gender Justice](#). This South Africa-based NGO works across Africa to strengthen government, civil society and citizen capacity to promote gender equality, prevent domestic and sexual violence, and reduce the spread and impact of HIV and AIDS.

Itumeleng Komanyane writes that Sonke Gender Justice envisions a world in which men, women and children can enjoy equitable, healthy and happy relationships that contribute to the development of just and democratic societies.

Creating greater empowerment and opportunity for all is a key value of the Mandela Washington Fellowship program. If you are a community leader involved with these important issues — like Mashayamombe and Komanyane — think about applying to become a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow. The application is open until November 5, 2014, so apply soon. Learn more [here](#).

[Answers to Your Questions About the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship](#)

During a live video chat on October 16, 2014, YALI Network members had the opportunity to ask questions about applying for the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders.

The fellowship is an intensive six-week program in the United States for aspiring leaders from throughout Africa.

Todd Haskell and Britta Bjornlund from the U.S. State Department provided answers to the following questions:

1. What are the selection criteria?

Applicants need to be between the ages of 25 and 35, able to speak English and citizens of Africa living in Africa. We're looking for leaders — people who are going to make a difference in the future of Africa.

2. Can I submit more than one application for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

No, you may submit only one application. Submitting additional applications will not increase your chances of getting in. If you do apply more than once, your applications will be disqualified.

3. Do Africans who have had substantial exposure to the United States through visits qualify?

The program targets young sub-Saharan Africans who have had less exposure to the United States. But no one is disqualified. We encourage you to apply.

4. Does submission of an application automatically qualify a person for U.S. citizenship?

No. We're looking for people who will go back to Africa and make a tremendous difference in their home countries.

5. What role does formal education play in the selection process?

We will consider your formal education, but you will not be disqualified if you do not have a formal diploma or degree. We are looking for leaders in communities in rural areas, in cities, in countries. We look at your whole package.

6. What is the required commitment to return to Africa?

The program is for people who plan to go back to Africa and apply the skills they've learned in the United States.

7. Last year I applied and was chosen as an alternate. Am I eligible to apply this year?

Absolutely. We encourage you to reapply.

8. Do I have to be rich to apply?

No. We welcome applicants who have modest backgrounds. We are looking for the best people regardless of their religion, gender, socio-economic standing, race or creed. We're looking for a diverse group of applicants.

9. What are the plans to ensure that young persons with disabilities are equally represented in the 2015 fellowship program?

All State Department exchange programs embrace diversity. In 2014, we made sure that fellows with disabilities could participate as easily as all other fellows. We are hoping to have people with disabilities in 2015.

10. If I do not have a passport when I apply, will it affect my chances of being selected?

No. If someone is selected, they will have enough time to get a passport and visa before they leave for the United States.

11. What costs does the Fellowship cover?

The U.S. State Department covers all costs involved in participating in the Mandela Washington Fellowship. That includes the costs of applying for a visa, round-trip airfare for travel between the United States and your home country, and living and travel costs during the fellowship.

12. What types of documents should a person attach to the application? Should they include their best reports or letters of recommendation?

It is up to you. We suggest you pick the documents that best reflect your professional expertise or your leadership capacity.

For more information about applying for the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders, go to yali.state.gov/apply.

For Frequently Asked Questions, see the [2015 Application FAQs](#) or watch these clips:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/52E0FFa-KwQ?list=PLEWYDE6Ehtrl48hhL3GkdN1Rox5YK7GHw>
